



The interplay between Turkish EFL learners' motivation and vocabulary knowledge

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Abstract

Vocabulary is regarded as an important part of communicative language ability and a significant predictor of second language proficiency. The relation between vocabulary knowledge and communicative language ability has important implications for L2 students, foreign language teachers and educational systems. Thus, many studies have been conducted to investigate this relation. However, there is scarce literature related to different factors which affect EFL learners' vocabulary knowledge. Hence, this study explored the relationship between motivation and vocabulary knowledge. 711 preparatory school students participated in the study. Language Learning Orientation Scale and Vocabulary Levels Test (VLT) were utilized in the data collection process. Participants emphasized the pragmatic use of English (extrinsic motives) rather than intrinsic motives, so findings revealed a moderate level of self-determination. The results of the vocabulary levels test showed that the mean score of the total vocabulary knowledge was below the average. On the other hand, a significant relationship was found between learners' motivation and their vocabulary knowledge. The results implied that language teachers should pay attention to their learners' motivation levels in order to increase their vocabulary knowledge.

Keywords: motivation, vocabulary size, language learning

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1. Introduction

1.1. Introduce the problem

In the language learning area, motivation was always regarded as one of the most significant individual factors which affects learners' foreign language learning. Gardner (1985) was the first to define motivation to learn a second or foreign language as “the extent to which the individual works or strives to learn the language because of a desire to do so and the satisfaction experienced in this activity” (p. 10). Gardner's (1985) socioeducational model proposes that L2 learners' desire to learn the L2, motivational intensity, and the attitudes toward L2 learning are the main determinants of motivation.

Later, cognitive and humanistic aspects of motivation caught the attention of

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different scholars who were seeking different ways to broaden the theoretical perspective of motivation during the 1990s (Crookes & Schmidt, 1991; Dörnyei, 1994, 2003; Oxford & Shearin, 1994). As an educational psychology theory, self-determination theory gained popularity during this time (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Self-determination theory suggests that human beings basically need autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Thus, to what extent these needs are satisfied causes various types of motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Also, self-determination theory makes a distinction between intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation means performing an action for its own sake to feel the joy of doing it while extrinsic motivation is defined as performing an action to receive some rewards or avoid punishment (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Considering L2 learning always involves both external and internal reasons, Noels et al. (Noels, Clement, & Pelletier, 1999; Noels, Pelletier, Clement, & Vallerand, 2000; Noels, 2001) investigated self-determination theory in L2 learning, and applied intrinsic/extrinsic continuum to language learning. Ryan's (1995) discussion of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation considers these constructs as orientations. Intrinsic orientations are directly related to one's inherent interest in the activity and the activity is performed to feel satisfied with it. Three different types of intrinsic orientations have been defined (Vallerand, Pelletier, Blais, Briere, Senecal, & Vallières, 1992, 1993; Vallerand, 1997)

Intrinsic-Knowledge involves the feelings of pleasure that is obtained from developing knowledge about a specific area. Intrinsic-Accomplishment is identified as the sense of enjoyment which is related with surpassing oneself and completing a difficult activity. The process of achievement is more important than the end result. Intrinsic-Stimulation is defined as the enjoyment of the aesthetics of the experience (Noels, Pelletier, Clement, & Vallerand, 2000).

Noels et al. (2000) also categorize three types of extrinsic motivation in accordance with the Deci and Ryan's (1985) self-determination theory. External Regulation is defined as the performance of an activity controlled by external forces. Introjected Regulation, which is more internalized, refers to reasons related with carrying out an activity because of the pressure that learners put on themselves, so that they force themselves to conduct that activity. Identified Regulation, the most self-determined form of extrinsic motivation, is related with performing an activity due to its importance for attaining a valued goal or personally related reasons.

On the other hand, Noels et al. (2000) claim that if learners do not have both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation to carry out an activity, they will feel amotivated which means that they will disengage from the activity because they will not find a meaningful reason to continue. This situation is defined as Amotivation by Noels et al. (2000), which is the third category of motivational constructs.

Noels (2001) argues that combining the intrinsic/extrinsic orientations and amotivation on a continuum is beneficial in terms of both organizing language learning goals systematically and also evaluating the classroom climate and the L2 teacher to determine to what extent they foster either control or autonomy. Noels (2001) claims that the correlation among the orientations that were theoretically closer on this continuum is higher compared to those further apart conceptually. So, the orientations on this continuum are not exclusive. If a learner's identified regulation is high, it is estimated that other orientations adjacent on the continuum will also have moderate levels.

Noels (2001) argues that learners are not motivated by one goal but several reasons may serve as important impetus for language learning, although the significance of them changes for each learner. In order to assess different parts of self-determination theory in the L2 motivation, the Language Learning Orientations Scale was developed by Noels et al. (2000). It includes intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and amotivation.

In addition to the significant role of motivation in foreign language learning, vocabulary knowledge has also an important place in L2 learning (Nation, 1990; Schmitt, Schmitt, & Clapham, 2001). It is regarded as one of the main elements of language proficiency which enables learners to speak, listen, read, and write (Schmitt, Schmitt, & Clapham, 2001). Without sufficient vocabulary knowledge, language learners may not be willing to get benefit from different language learning opportunities (Richards & Renandya, 2002). However, the effect of vocabulary knowledge has not caught the attention of L2 researchers for a long time (Richards & Renandya, 2002). Recently, it has become an important area of research for researchers, curriculum designers and theorists (Hermann, 2003).

Vocabulary is regarded as an important part of communicative language ability. The relation between vocabulary knowledge and communicative language ability has important implications for L2 students, foreign language teachers and educational systems. Thus, many studies have been conducted to investigate this relation. Hilton (2008) claimed that there was a direct relationship between vocabulary size and spoken fluency. He investigated the fluency findings from a corpus of oral productions in three different L2s and found out that 'lexical competence' had a fundamental role in spoken fluency. Based on this finding, Hilton (2008) argued that the concept of "lexical competence" should be given more emphasis in language-teaching programmes.

Considering the importance of vocabulary knowledge for communicative competence, different factors which affect the vocabulary knowledge of learners are gaining importance. Although motivation is one of these factors which is gaining attention among L2 researchers, the number of studies which look into the relationship between motivation and vocabulary size is limited. Zheng (2012) found out the significant role of motivation in foreign language learners' vocabulary learning in a Chinese setting

and Fontecha and Gallego (2012) confirmed that there was a positive relationship between learners' motivation levels and L2 Spanish vocabulary levels. None of the studies in the Turkish EFL context examined this issue. Hence, this study tried to explore the relationship between motivation and vocabulary knowledge of foreign language learners in a Turkish EFL context because motivation was always one of the most significant factors which triggers language learning.

1.2. Research Questions

So, the main goal of this study is to examine the motivation levels of EFL learners by means of the Language Learning Orientation Scale (Noels, 2001) and to what extent their motivation levels affect their vocabulary knowledge which is a significant predictor of second language proficiency (Laufer & Hulstijn, 2001; Sener, 2003).

The related questions of the study are as in the following:

- 1- What are the Turkish university students' perceptions of their motivation in L2 class?
- 2- What is the receptive vocabulary knowledge of the Turkish university students?
- 3- Is there any significant relationship between EFL students' motivation and vocabulary knowledge in L2 class?

2. Method

The study's main objective is to look into the connection between vocabulary knowledge and motivation in Turkish EFL learners. This was accomplished through the collection and analysis of quantitative data.

2.1. Research design

For this research, questionnaires were used for the quantitative data collection. Quantitative approaches, according to Taylor and Trumbull (2005), are unbiased and credible. The goal of quantitative studies is to precisely characterize a phenomenon and demonstrate how various interventions can bring it under control. The researcher in quantitative research keeps an impartial stance, and data is gathered through the use of objective metrics. According to the description above, questionnaires were used to collect the aforementioned numerical data, and their validity was verified through testing.

2.2. Participants

711 students participated in the study. Most of these students recently graduated from high schools and it was their first year at university. These students started learning English in the fourth grade in elementary school. Most of them (83%) were between ages 20-22 which indicates a young group of learners. 60% of the participants were female while males in the study were 39%. Their proficiency levels ranged from elementary (ELE) to advanced (ADV). 56% of the participants were at pre-intermediate and elementary levels, while the percentage of the learners at advanced and intermediate levels was 43%. These percentages indicate a fair distribution among the proficiency levels of learners. Participants were selected through cluster random sampling.

Table 1. Nationality, level, age and gender distribution of the participants

		n	%
Nationality	Turkish	707	99.4
	Other	4	0.6
	Total	711	100.0
Level	ADV	147	20.7
	INT	165	23.2
	PIN	180	25.3
	ELE	219	30.8
	Total	711	100.0
Gender	Female	429	60.3
	Male	282	39.7
	Total	711	100.0
Age	17-19 ages	614	86.4
	20-22 ages	83	11.7
	23-25 ages	7	1.0
	26-28 ages	2	0.3
	28-above	5	0.7
	Total	711	100.0

2.3. Data Collection Tools

Language Learning Orientation Scale and Vocabulary Levels Tests were utilized for this study.

a. Motivation: 21 items adapted from Language Learning Orientation Scale, which was originally developed by Noels et. al. (2000) and later expanded and adapted by McIntosh and Noels (2004), were used to measure students' motivation in two subcomponents of LLOS scale which are intrinsic motivation (knowledge, accomplishment, and stimulation) and extrinsic motivation (external, introjected, and identified regulation) on a 6-point Likert scale. The Turkish version of the scale which was translated by Şad & Gürbüzürk (2009) was utilized in the study. Factor analysis of the adapted scale in the study revealed an internal consistency coefficient of $\alpha = .823$ (Şad & Gürbüzürk, 2009).

b. Vocabulary Levels Tests: To be able to assess the vocabulary knowledge of students in this study, Schmitt, Schmitt, and Clapham's (2001) the Vocabulary Levels Test (VLT) was utilized. The Vocabulary Levels Test (VLT) was originally developed by Nation in the 1980s (published in Nation, 1990), and subsequently revised by Schmitt, Schmitt, and Clapham in 2001. It is a tool to measure the written receptive vocabulary knowledge, i.e. mainly the word knowledge required for reading. The Vocabulary Levels Test (VLT) assesses this knowledge of learners at four frequency levels of English word families: 2,000, 3,000, 5,000 and 10,000, hence the name “Levels Test”. In addition to the four frequency-based levels, the Vocabulary Levels Test (VLT) includes test items from the Academic Word List (AWL) (Coxhead, 2000) in the 2001 version. In this study, only 3000, 5000 and academic vocabulary levels were utilized. Each section of the VLT consists of 30 items in a multiple matching format. Three items therefore represent 100 words of any particular frequency band. Items are clustered together in 10 groups for this, so that learners are presented in each cluster with six words in a column on the left and the corresponding meaning senses of three of these in another column on the right. Learners were asked to match each meaning sense in the right-hand column which one single word from the left-hand column. Thus, the test asks learners to recognize the form rather than the meaning (Schmitt, 2010).

2.4. Data Analysis

For the quantitative data analysis, descriptive statistics of Language Learning Orientation Scale were calculated. The results of the vocabulary levels test were also calculated through the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and maximum, minimum and mean scores were calculated.

Pearson correlation coefficients were used to evaluate the relationship between motivation and vocabulary knowledge of learners (e.g. control of normality and linearity).

3. Results

3.1. Findings about the First Research Question

Motivation of the students were measured through Language Learning Orientation Scale under two subcategories: intrinsic motivation (knowledge, accomplishment, and stimulation) and extrinsic motivation (external, introjected, and identified regulation). For each type of motivation, means and standard deviations were calculated based on a 6-point scale. Frequencies and percentages of each subcategory and each item are presented in the Table 2. Findings revealed that students had a higher level of External Regulation type of motivation (mean=5.24) and Identified Regulation (mean=5.08), while they had a moderate level of Intrinsic Motivation-Knowledge (mean=4.39), Intrinsic Motivation-Stimulation (mean=4.08), and Intrinsic Motivation-Accomplishment (mean=3.73). Compared to other types of motivation, students were found to have a lower level of Introjected Regulation (mean= 3.25), which is another extrinsically oriented motivation.

Generally, students exhibited positive dispositions towards the reasons for learning English. Except for two items, the mean scores of all items were found be above the average. The mean scores of item 5 (because I enjoy the challenge of learning English) and item 16 (to show myself that I am a good citizen because I can speak English) were found to be 2.98, which is slightly below the average mean score (on a scale of 1 to 6, with a score of 3 indicating the average score). These items were identified as the least significant reasons for learning English. Item 20 (because I think it's a good idea to know some English) received the highest mean score (mean=5.41), followed by the item 18 (because it may be a gateway to new opportunities) with a mean score of 5.35 and item 21 (in order to get a more prestigious job later on) with a mean score of 5.28. Thus, these items were determined as the most significant reasons for learning English. Overall, it can be concluded that the students in this study especially emphasized the pragmatic use of English (extrinsic motives) rather than intrinsic motives, so findings revealed a moderate level of self-determination.

Table 2. Motivation levels

Motivation Items	Mean	SD
1- Because I enjoy the feeling of acquiring knowledge about the English community and their way of life.	4.14	1.45
2- For the pleasure that I experience in knowing more about the literature of the the English-speaking community.	4.12	1.47
3- In order to understand more about English.	4.78	1.27
4- For the satisfied feeling I get in finding out new things.	4.53	1.27
Intrinsic Motivation-Knowledge	4.39	1.36
5- Because I enjoy the challenge of learning English.	2.98	1.55
6- For the enjoyment I experience when I grasp a difficult construct in English.	3.75	1.61
7- For the pleasure I experience when surpassing myself in my English studies.	4.19	1.48
8- For the satisfaction I feel when I am in the process of accomplishing difficult exercises in English.	4.01	1.51
Intrinsic Motivation-Accomplishment	3.73	1.53
9- Because I think English is a beautiful language.	3.95	1.64
10- For the pleasure I get from hearing English spoken by native English speakers.	4.37	1.53
11- For the “high” I feel when hearing English.	3.93	1.63
Intrinsic Motivation-Stimulation	4.08	1.60
12- Because I choose to be the kind of person who can speak English.	4.91	1.35
13- Because I choose to be the kind of person who can speak more than one language.	5.18	1.17
14- Because I think it is good for my personal development.	5.15	1.11
Extrinsic Motivation- Identified Regulation	5.08	1.21
15- Because I would feel ashamed if I couldn’t speak to my friends from the English-speaking community in their native tongue.	3.44	1.68
16- To show myself that I am a good citizen because I can speak English.	2.98	1.59
17- Because I would feel guilty if I didn’t know English.	3.35	1.76
Extrinsic Motivation- Introjected Regulation	3.25	1.67
18- Because it may be a gateway to new opportunities.	5.35	1.01
19- In order to have a better salary later on.	4.95	1.31
20- Because I think it’s a good idea to know some English.	5.41	1.01
21- In order to get a more prestigious job later on.	5.28	1.15
Extrinsic Motivation- External Regulation	5.24	1.12
Total	4.32	1.40

3.2. Findings about the Second Research Question

The results of the vocabulary levels test showed that the mean score of the total vocabulary knowledge was below the average. Also, the mean scores of each three tests were found to be below the average although the mean score of the 3000 word level was very close to average. Results indicated that participants did not have sufficient vocabulary knowledge. Although the highest mean score was found at 3000 word level, the lowest mean score was found at 5000 word level.

Table 3. Vocabulary levels test results

Vocabulary Size	Min	Max	Mean	SD
3000 Word Level	1	30	14.25	8.56
5000 Word Level	0	30	10.14	8.51
Academic Vocabulary	0	30	11.63	10.03
Total Vocabulary Knowledge	1	90	36.04	25.42

3.3. Findings about the Third Research Question

As a first step, the preliminary statistical analyses were conducted. Then, Pearson correlation coefficients indicated that there was a positive correlation between these two variables at a statistically significant level ($r(711) = .228, p < .01$). This result shows that motivation levels of foreign language learners would have a positive effect on their vocabulary knowledge in L2.

Table 4. Relationship between motivation and vocabulary knowledge

	1	2	3	4
Motivation	1			
Vocabulary Knowledge	.228**	1		

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The main goal of this study was to examine the EFL learners' vocabulary knowledge in the Turkish context, and to determine if motivational factors would have an effect on learners' vocabulary knowledge. The correlation between motivation and vocabulary knowledge in this study put emphasis on the effect of motivation on learners' vocabulary knowledge. In general, the results revealed that students have positive tendencies towards learning English. It was found that students mostly give importance to the pragmatic use of English (extrinsic motives) rather than intrinsic motives. Results showed that they had a higher level of External Regulation type of motivation and Identified Regulation, while they had a moderate level of Intrinsic Motivation-Knowledge, Intrinsic Motivation-Stimulation, and Intrinsic Motivation-Accomplishment. Although learners generally exhibited positive dispositions towards the reasons for learning, increasing learners intrinsic motivation through different activities would result in a higher level of vocabulary knowledge in English. Thus, L2 educators would help learners to acquire a sense of accomplishment, knowledge and stimulation which are all components of intrinsic motivation by means of successful learning experience because a higher level of self-determination means a higher level of vocabulary knowledge.

In this study, the mean score of the total vocabulary knowledge was found to be below the average, which indicates that learners have problems in learning vocabulary. So, language teachers should help them to improve their vocabulary by means of various methods which would increase their motivation levels. Teachers should guide their learners in this way by organizing different activities which directly aim at developing learners' vocabulary knowledge. Considering the relationship between motivation and vocabulary knowledge, teachers should focus on different factors which would increase learners' motivation. It can be stated that the pleasant classroom environment has an important role in increasing learners' motivation. So, it is suggested that classroom environment should have a pleasant atmosphere by means of effective teacher support, student cohesiveness and careful selection of tasks. Ekin and Mirici (2022) claims that communicative language teaching is a much more powerful motivator for improving English language skills by giving students active opportunities to use the English they have passively learned in their grammar classes. In addition, board games are suggested as the most engaging form of communicative language teaching because they are appropriate for students of all ages. So, different vocabulary games could be integrated into language classes which could increase learners' motivation. Language teachers should build a good rapport with their learners. Teachers could strengthen their bond with their learners through their encouraging, supportive, and patient teaching styles. Language teachers give place to group work or pair work activities in their classrooms in which learners work together to achieve a learning goal, which will definitely increase

their motivation level to a great extent. English teachers should be able to integrate intellectually meaningful and challenging tasks into their classes at some points instead of strictly following English books because university level EFL learners are mature enough to critically evaluate the quality and value of English activities with respect to their beliefs or expectations.

Considering that this is the first study which examines the relationship between motivation and vocabulary knowledge in the Turkish context, more studies should be carried out at different learning settings with different age groups. Also, this study only dealt with receptive vocabulary knowledge of foreign language learners. For further research, including productive vocabulary knowledge would give a more clear picture about the effect of motivation on learners' vocabulary knowledge.

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